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Great Place? 'Cow town with an opera house'

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By Bret Hayworth
Journal staff writer

The text has been written, the art for the PowerPoint presentation chosen, public pronouncements made, hands shaken, farewells exchanged.

The pursuit by more than 100 Sioux Cityans to have the city's downtown/riverfront named one of Iowa's three Great Places reached a climax Wednesday, when three Great Places Citizens Advisory Board members came to observe first-hand the city's presentation.

They heard that Sioux City, "a cow town with an opera house," is ready to jump ahead on several major projects, building on a history tied to the stock-

yards and riverfront adjacent to downtown. If the city is selected, the fledgling 2005 Great Places program would direct some funding to the proposal, but also provide the expertise of up to 19 state agencies.

First with a 25-minute PowerPoint presentation by Briar Cliff University president Bev Wharton and local archi-

tectural designer Nathan Kalaher, followed by a 35-minute tour of the downtown places referenced, the plan that would cost \$75 million was laid out before 130 observers in the Orpheum Theatre.

The first slide on the screen for the time preceding the event kickoff was far from subtle, reading simply, "Downtown Sioux City, a great place."

"By becoming an Iowa Great Place,

our success will be dramatically accelerated as we work together to redefine how residents, visitors and the world beyond see, feel and think about Sioux City," Kalaher said.

The proposal began with a recap of recent additions to the downtown and riverfront, including the \$12 million Orpheum restoration, \$11 million Mr Tym Marina on the Missouri River and \$3.5 million Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center.

That was the launching point for Wharton, who described the five elements of the plan — improvements on the front door of the city on the riverfront, the Stockyards, Floyd Boulevard

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Great Places board member **Claire Celsi** is interviewed in downtown Sioux City after hearing the proposal to have the downtown/riverfront named as one of three Iowa Great Places. (Staff photo by Jerry Mennenga)

Decision

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Local Foods Market, Fourth Street (not limited to Historic Fourth Street) and creation of the Sioux City School of Architecture.

The "riverfront is emerging as one of Sioux City's crown jewels, a tourism magnet already thriving with recreational, cultural and historic attractions, and poised to deliver much, much more," Wharton said. "The once under-utilized resource is drawing tens of thousands of people to its banks for year-round activities that celebrate Sioux City's heritage, diversity and zest for living."

A key point of the front door improvements would be creation of a "signature bridge" that would directly link downtown to the river, Wharton said. For about \$1.5 million, an eye-pleasing bridge with terra cotta elements would, she said, "open access to the riverfront to pedestrians and vehicles."

All the downtown/riverfront components would cost about \$225 million through 2012, although \$30 million for the Gordon Drive Viaduct renovation

and \$120 million for the Interstate 29 exits reconstruction is already planned by the Iowa Department of Transportation. Taking that state money out of the equation, about \$75 million would cover the other portions of the plan.

The top pricetag goes to a \$35 million Stockyards renovation, which would take a channel that now is "concrete, weeds and a trickle of water," Wharton said, and create a vibrant, open area with trails, waterway, pedestrian bridges and interpretive park summarizing the history of the yards. With old stock pens being

cleared out and Home Depot building a store in the Stockyards, the "historic area now in the process of rebirth" would get another boost, she said.

The Sioux City Great Places plan would be paid for with a combination of public and private funding and most of the portions could proceed in 2006 and 2007, Kalaher said. Where possible, terra cotta architecture would be employed to tie the downtown together with a common visual brand, he said.

Summarizing the proposal, Kalaher said, "We are committed to this plan. But with your help this plan can become a reality in a shortened time period. It is not

so much a question of 'Can Sioux City accomplish this plan?' as much as it is a question of 'When will Sioux City accomplish this plan?' Whether or not we are designated as an Iowa Great Place, the plan will proceed to connect developing parts into a transforming whole."

The board will pick three Great Places on Oct. 3. The Sioux City plan drew positive comments from Iowa House Speaker Christopher Rants of Sioux City and city manager Paul Eckert as they exited the venue.

Also in the theatre was Gene McNaughton, who worked 35 years in the stockyards before now serving as a "jack-of-all-trades" in the Orpheum. McNaughton said "the Sioux City Stockyards was 'it' at one time in Sioux City," so he liked inclusion of a yards renovation in the Great Places plan.

He said portions like restoring the Hose House in the yards is important. A reworking of the yard with green spaces, trails and such, McNaughton said, would honor history of the yards, yet move it ahead.

Note: The Journal Web site contains a link (www.siouxcityjournal.com/great_places) to view the Great Places presentation in its entirety.

Board to make Great Places decision Oct. 3

By Bret Hayworth
Journal staff writer

A week ago, in giving the Journal's editorial board a peek at the Great Places presentation, Siouxland Chamber of Commerce president Debi Dugan said she was looking to provide a "wow factor."

That's what the Great Places Citizen Advisory Board judges are looking for as well, although they'll have a lot of information to pore over in picking one of three Iowa Great Places. A decision will be announced Oct. 3 in Des Moines.

As he prepared to leave Sioux City, board member and Council Bluffs Mayor Tom Hanafan said, "We have to have a wow factor. I think

that is what the board is looking for, a 'wow.'"

Board member Claire Celsi of Des Moines said "what we are really looking for are communities that have strong community-based support and some way to produce results immediately with the projects they are working on."

Rotating to all the finalist cities, the 12 board members will each see about two dozen of the 73 one-hour presentations in person, then view about 50 more on video if they want. Celsi has seen 20 presentations from all corners of the state and said "all of the presentations have been fabulous. There is so much community spirit in Iowa and we're just thrilled with all the projects going on in Iowa. It is very inspira-

tional."

According to the Great Places Web site, the board will consider offers in context of seven dimensions — a unique sense of place, engaging experiences, rich social fabric, vital economy, pleasing environment, strong foundation and a creative culture.

Celsi said she envisions the board will pick one project from a smaller town, one from a city and one tied to a broader geographical land-

form area. Hanafan wasn't sure the selected projects would be broken down that way.

He said the presentation of a small-town project may differ in polish from that coming from a larger metro-





area, but can be equally intriguing. Hanafan cited the Granger, Iowa, project seen Tuesday as worth merit for a smaller town. And, he said, "I thought Sioux City's presentation is a great idea" and that a lot of thought was put into it.

Initially, 145 cities/areas submitted Great Places applications. The list was pared to 73 holding board forums, including Whiting, Deaf Smith, Iowa Grove, Storm Lake, Lake View, Council Bluffs, Southern, Okmaha, Estherville and Emmetsburg in Northwest Iowa.

"We continue to tell people there are no losers in this

only winners," Hanafan said. "Since some wonderful — if not 'great' — projects have been brainstormed by people who can make them happen." Great Places board member Dave Bernstein of Sioux City was also seated on the dais, but Celsi said he was only there as a host, not deliberating. As Celsi and Hanafan said, when the cities they live in give a Great Places presentation, they rescue themselves from participation.

"We had dinner with Dave last night and he gave us a little tour," Celsi said, "and we said, 'You should show

up and come and sit with us.' He gave us a tour of the Orpheum, which I am so impressed with."

The other board member, Bill Menner of Grinnell, made sure he'd recall his Orpheum visit. At the corner of Sixth and Pierce streets, Menner turned and snapped a picture of the entrance. The single line on the marquee read: "Welcome Iowa Great Places."

Hanafan could remember it well too. Right before being interviewed in the Wilbur Aalfs Library parking lot, he pulled a parking violation ticket off his convertible.

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Great Places proposal costs

Subtracting a \$120 million Interstate 29 reworking and \$30 million renovation of the Gordon Drive Viaduct, the Sioux City downtown/riverfront Great Places proposal presented Wednesday would cost roughly \$75 million. Among the pricetags:

- \$35 million: Stockyards Channel transformation with trails, waterway, pedestrian bridges, landscaping and interpretive park
- \$9 million: Rehabilitate and reopen the Badgerow Building
- \$8.4 million: An improved parking ramp on Jones Street
- \$6.5 million: A new city museum in the former JCPenney building, perhaps combined with a western Iowa state university facility
- \$3 million: Demolition of the empty KD Station
- \$2.5 million: Enhancing the Gordon viaduct project to include terra cotta architecture elements
- \$2 million: Connecting the disconnected 18 miles of recreation trails
- \$1.5 million: Signature bridge in terra cotta linking downtown to the riverfront
- \$1.3 million: Enhance the Floyd Boulevard Local Foods Market
- \$250,000: Hose House restoration in the Stockyards



Members of the Great Places Iowa board talk among themselves and with representatives of the Sioux City Great Places Committee Wednesday

morning, outside the Martin Luther King Jr. Transportation Center after completing a tour of the area. (Staff photo by Jerry Mennenga)